

VZCZCXRO2044
PP RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHDR #0894/01 1721435
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 211435Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6349
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 3216
RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA PRIORITY 2555
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI PRIORITY 0160
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA PRIORITY 3034
RUEHLGB/AMEMBASSY KIGALI PRIORITY 0983
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0321
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI PRIORITY 0692
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0225
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0447
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA//J3 PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DAR ES SALAAM 000894

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/20/2012
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SUBJECT: ISLAMIC RADICALS BLOCKS AMERICAN MUSLIMS FROM
EVENING PRAYERS

REF: DAR ES SALAAM 0867

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission, D. Purnell Delly for reasons 1.
2 (b,d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) American Muslims visiting Tanzania from May 27-31 as part of the Citizen Dialogue Program (reftel) were surprisingly refused entry to a mosque in downtown Dar es Salaam. As the American visitors arrived for evening prayers, a group of about 30 men congregated at the mosque's gate to block an Embassy vehicle from entering inside. The crowd shouted in Swahili, protesting that the visitors were from America. The crowd did not appear to gather spontaneously but rather seemed to be organized with a plan to block the gate. According to more moderate Muslim leaders in Dar es Salaam who met with EmbOffs June 7, "radical youth" and possibly Iranian-backed radical Muslims from other mosques were responsible for the incident. The moderate leaders highlighted the rise of Shia and Iranian influence among Tanzanian Muslims, noting that although Wahhabism exists in Tanzania, it was Shia influence responsible for the unwelcome reception. END SUMMARY.

Mosque Refuses Entry to American Muslims

2. (SBU) On May 27, the first day of post's Citizen Dialogue Program (CDP), visiting Muslim scholars Tiye Mulazim, Na'eel Cajee, and Imam Bashar Mohammed Arafat were scheduled to pray at Kichangani mosque in Dar es Salaam at 6:00 pm. One week in advance, the APAO coordinated with Assistant Imam Jaffar Mohamed of Kichangani mosque who had readily agreed to welcome the American visitors for evening prayers and in fact, invited Imam Bashar to lead prayers and speak with members that evening. However, as two Embassy vehicles waited in the mosque's parking lot, an angry group of about thirty men gathered at the mosque's gate, refusing to allow the third Embassy vehicle to enter.

3. (SBU) Fifteen minutes of discussion failed to persuade the crowd to permit the Embassy vehicle to enter inside the

gate. Avoiding further confrontation with the protesters, Embassy officials left Kichangani mosque with the delegation.

As the Embassy vehicles departed, the crowd shouted "Takbir Allahu Akbar" (God is the greatest). (Note: Takbir Allahu Akbar is an Arabic expression often used to signal a sense of victory or applause.) The delegation proceeded to a nearby mosque in downtown Dar es Salaam where they were warmly welcomed for evening prayers without any incident. The remaining four days of the CDP's visit, also went without incident and generated a great deal of dialogue between Muslim Tanzanians and the American scholars.

14. (SBU) It is unclear whether the Assistant Imam of the Kichangani mosque, Imam Mohammed, who agreed to host the CDP delegates was present on May 27 or not. A few days later, however, Imam Mohammed sent a message to the PAO apologizing for the situation and asking to meet the CDP visitors at a later date. The Head Imam of Kichangani mosque was traveling outside of Dar es Salaam during the incident and did not provide any comment.

Radical Youth Vent Anger About U.S. Policy

15. (C) To gain a better understanding of the incident at Kichangani mosque, EmbOffs met with Sheik Issa Othman of Mikocheni B, one of Dar es Salaam's largest mosques, and Hassan Mnyenye, Chief Executive Officer of the Mwinyibarakaa Islamic Foundation on June 7. Asked why followers of the mosque objected to Assistant Imam's decision to invite the American Muslims to pray, Sheik Othman explained that the group blockading the gate was comprised of younger radical members who he called "fanatics." He noted that the crowd was trying to take advantage of the U.S. delegation's visit

DAR ES SAL 00000894 002 OF 003

to vent their anger and frustration at USG policy.

16. (C) Without speculating on why the mosque's Assistant Imam did not rein in the protesting crowd on May 27, Sheik Othman said that in Tanzania it was common for young Muslims to use their strength in numbers and pressure older Imams: "They use democracy within the mosques as a way to get their views heard, sometimes even threatening older imams that they will kick them out if their views are not considered." Sheik Othman said he believed that followers of the Kichangani mosque were aware of the U.S. visit in advance thus giving more extreme members of the Dar es Salaam Muslim community time to organize a protest and gain media attention.

Rise of Shia Influence: Shia for All

17. (C) Addressing the issue of extremism among Muslim youth in Tanzania, Sheik Othman stressed the rise of Shia influence in both rural and urban areas throughout the country. Hassan Mnyenye of the Islamic Foundation, who accompanied Othman explained: "It used to be that Shia were only the Asians in Tanzania. Now it is Shia for all!" The notion of a black or "African Shia," is a relatively new phenomenon, beginning in the 1990s with the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini, Sheik Othman noted. He added, "Before Khomeini, the Shia were like Jews. They didn't preach and they kept to themselves. This all changed with Khomeini." Another source close to PAO staff also reported that the blockade at Kichangani was a result of Iranian Shia influence.

18. (C) Sheik Othman noted that the Shia managed to spread their influence "not by talking or preaching but by doing." Shia followers are running schools, health clinics, orphanages, and cultural centers, helping the poor solve their problems. A poor Muslim in Dar es Salaam can go to the Iranian Cultural Center seeking help, the Sheik explained. Asked if the Shia influence was primarily concentrated in Dar es Salaam, both Mnyenye and Sheik Othman emphasized that the Shia influence permeated all parts of the country including Morogoro, Iringa and Tanga. "In fact, Sunni clerics prefer Dar es Salaam where life is convenient.

Thus Shia influence has been able to rise in areas outside Dar es Salaam more quickly," Sheik Othman told PolOff.

¶9. (C) Sheik Othman clarified that the Shia were not openly trying to persuade Sunnis to join their mosques and convert: "Rather, Shia are praying at Sunni mosques and trying to exert influence through 'takia,' a Shia strategy where one hides his/her beliefs to achieve a certain end." According to Sheik Othman, Shia will frequent Sunni mosques concealing the fact that they are Shia and try to influence followers of the mosque to hold more extreme viewpoints. Mnyenye added, "Many Sunni imams and followers are afraid of this Shia influence but they don't know what to do. The National Council of Tanzanian Muslims, BAKWATA, has done absolutely nothing to deal with the problem." (Note: BAKWATA is the official GOT organization handling Islamic affairs on the mainland.)

¶10. (C) Sheik Othman expressed his personal view that the rise of Shia influence in Tanzania reflects Tehran's policy to gain support through religion. While few Tanzanians actually travel to Iran, the Sheik said Iran managed to bring its influence to Tanzania through Shia organizations and Shia followers. He did note that every year the Iranian Cultural Center in Dar es Salaam holds a Koranic recitation contest for Muslim students, sponsoring the three best students to travel to Iran for religious studies.

What About Wahhabism?

¶11. (C) According to Sheik Othman, Wahhabism does exist in Tanzania but is not on the rise as much as the Shiism. He said that Wahhabism spread to Tanzania from Saudi Arabia and from Somalis who came to Tanzania to conduct business. He

DAR ES SAL 00000894 003 OF 003

identified both Tanga and Iringa as regions where there was some Wahhabi influence and mentioned the Nurain Institute in Iringa as a school with Wahhabi influence. "The Nurain institute used to be isolated and relatively closed, but it is now opening up," the Sheik said.

Comment: Importance of Sustained Islamic Outreach

¶12. (C) The crowd blockading the Kichangani mosque underlined the fact that an extreme brand of Islam does exist in Tanzania, espousing the unfortunate view that anti-Americanism is somehow essential to being Muslim. Moderate Muslims such as Sheik Othman, and even the Assistant Imam Jaffar of Kichangani mosque, appear to be at odds or at least uncomfortable with this extremism and unsure how to proceed. Sheik Othman encouraged the Embassy to increase collaboration with various Muslim organizations and increase dialogue to promote increased mutual understanding. In line with our FY 2009 Mission Strategic Plan, Post has undertaken a coordinated, multi-agency effort over the past six months to scale up Muslim outreach efforts along the Swahili Coast. The Citizen Dialogue Program, including the incident at Kichangani mosque, only reinforced the importance of our sustained outreach to promote religious tolerance and understanding between the U.S. and Tanzania's Muslims. END COMMENT.
RETZER